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AUTHOR	Troutt, George, Jr.; Jennings, Bettye
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ABSTRACT

The development of a competency base for a preschool curriculum is described in this report on the Home-Oriented Preschool Education (HOPE) Process, a three-component educational system for 3, 4, and 5-year-old children. The major goal of the HOPE Process is to affect the parent-child instructional relationship by delivering the curriculum through different but integrated components: a home visit, a television presentation, and a group experience. The home visitor, a paraprofessional, helps the parent learn effective ways of instructing children. Television presentations, broadcast five days each week, are produced to achieve specific objectives derived from the curriculum, and the group experience is conducted by a group experience leader and is designed to achieve objectives for a classroom type situation. Objectives are coordinated with home visit and television presentation objectives. (Author)

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A Competency Base For Curriculum Development In Preschool Education

George Troutt, Jr. Ph. D.
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Bettye Jennings Ph.D.
West Virginia College of Graduate Studies

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A Competency Base For Curriculum
Development In Preschool Education

Unless the children in Appalachia live in one of the larger cities, chances are they will get no schooling until they are in the first grade. There are some kindergartens and nursery schools in non-urban Appalachia, but they are few and far between. This status of early childhood education does not appear to have changed much in the past quarter century. As one views the future of preschool programming in Appalachia, some common concerns emerge:

- It's expensive to build rooms for kindergarten populations.
- It's expensive to buy and maintain busses to transport children from isolated areas.
- It's expensive to hire the necessary number of professionals.
- It's difficult to reach some children who live in the rugged mountain regions.
- There is not a keen commitment to kindergarten education by the residents of the region.

But, children probably learn more in the first five years of life than they do the rest of their lives. They pick up habits and ways of looking at things that can affect them in school and life beyond. They get set in their ways, and some of those ways cause major difficulties for them. Children in Appalachia need early schooling just as do children in other parts of the world but for some very specific reasons. a) The isolated regions of Appalachia and in other non-urban areas, children don't have a lot of (other than family) people with whom to converse. Even in some families there isn't much conver-

sation. Thus, there are children growing up in non-urban Appalachia whose language fluency is not enough to help them get along well in school. b) There are children growing up in non-urban Appalachia who are shy and afraid of personal interactions with others. They may be held back all of their lives because of fear and shyness. They need to have the opportunity to interact with people and customs that are strange to them. c) Many children in non-urban Appalachia have no way of learning about people and their customs that are different from their mountain or their "holler." When they are young and building a base for their life, a variety of experiences should be provided.

Thus a dilemma. The need for an early education program in an area where it is not the accepted norm and that would get to children where they live, should be within reason, financially and feasibly, and serve their needs intellectually. There is a preschool education program which strikes a happy medium between "going to school" and learning at home. That program is called HOPE.

HOPE stands for "Home-Oriented Preschool Education." It was created for non-urban children of Appalachia by an organization called Appalachia Educational Laboratory. The main purpose of HOPE is to assist parents in teaching their preschool children things they need to know to be more competent individuals. There are some sound professional reasons for doing this.

In recent years, the traditional patterns of early schooling have undergone many changes. One of the most widespread trends today is the home-based program. There are many variations, but a key concept in all has been the parent as an instructor of his child. Bronfenbrenner (1972) has made several observations on effective intervention programs for young children. "A home-based program is effective to the extent that the target of intervention is

neither the child nor the parent, but the child-parent system." Bronfenbrenner argues that effective intervention programs must be based upon intensive, complex, enduring patterns of interaction in the family relationships. In his terms, any home visitor program should reinforce and not interfere with the formation, maintenance, status, or continuing development of the parent-child system.

Colmen and Sandoval (1971) argue for the primacy of the parental role in educating young children. The crucial group education experiences of the preschool child must not be fully discharged from parental responsibility. "The concept of parent education is based on the belief that early gains can be made economically by maximizing the home as a learning environment and the ability of parents as teachers." A complex need for home-based security in the education of young children seems to encompass parental interaction and relationships with other siblings. Childrearing and educational practices may not be reducible to just the simple preschool needs in the academic area. The needs of preschool children must be seen as a complex interacting field, not merely as personal characteristics separate from the system.

The aforementioned statements underlie the need for HOPE. This is the way HOPE works:

TELEVISION: Each day during the school year, a half-hour television program is broadcast into the children's homes on regular television channels. These programs have Appalachian settings and characters. They teach the things children should and can learn in an interesting, story-like framework. The TV programs are like lessons in a textbook--a textbook that everyone who is a part of HOPE can turn to.

HOME VISITS: HOPE's second part is the Home Visitor. She is someone especially trained to work with parents and children, right in their home. Once a week, she visits each home assigned to her. She knows that the home is a place where the child can be free of fear, embarrassment, shyness, and other distractions to learning.

PARENTS: Because the parent knows her child better than anyone else does, the Home Visitor teaches the parent how to teach instead of trying to teach the child directly herself.

MATERIALS: Not only does the Home Visitor take learning materials into the homes and demonstrate them, she also shows the parents how common objects in the home can be used for teaching.

GROUP SESSION: The final part of HOPE is the group session. Each week each child in the program gets together with other HOPE children in the neighborhood. They all meet under the supervision of a leader who is usually a certified teacher. This allows those children to interact with other children and adults in a school-like setting. On an average, 15 to 20 children meet for two-hour sessions. There are several reasons for holding these sessions:

- To help children learn to work and play together.
- To get children used to an atmosphere which is more like school than home.
- To accustom the children to meeting new people.

- To provide the children with learning materials which they would not usually have at home.
- The parents often have meetings at the same time the children are attending the group session, giving them the chance to interact with other parents of children the same age as their own.

In order for HOPE to be successful, television lessons, home visitor's visits, and group meetings must fit well together. The activities in all three parts are based on a master lesson plan, or curriculum, to insure that all areas of learning are accounted for and that a lesson introduced in one part will be picked up on and complemented in another (See Chart 2, page 11). Furthermore, parents, children, home visitors, and group leaders must share information and suggestions about every part of the program, so that it can be changed to fit the children's needs and abilities. The Big Question becomes, "What do we teach?"

Determining What To Teach

When one begins to develop programmatic efforts in the field of early childhood education, one leading question emerges sooner or later. What can children, at the ages that programs are developed for them, be expected to do, perform, or accomplish? When one attempts to answer this question, several other questions arise.

- Do children grow and develop in a systematic way, providing specific stages of growth that can be specifically identified at age 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.?
- Is learning to learn sequential? (Must certain skills be learned before other skills can be mastered?)

PS 005 452

- Do we have consensus among the child growth and development scholars about the specifics of growing and developing?

These questions become formidable obstacles to building a curriculum or, for that matter, structuring a program base. Answers to the questions are nonexistent or not readily available. A literature search provided bits and pieces of child growth and development theory based to some degree on empiricism; e.g., Butler et al ('71); Anderson and Messick ('73) and White ('71). The bits and pieces, to some degree, are there but a comprehensive listing was unavailable. Therefore, an investigation is underway to answer at least some parts, to some degree, of the aforementioned questions. The investigation involves conducting a systematic search for a master list of competencies, terminal behavior 6 years 0 months which "normal" American children possess via innateness or acquisition.

The investigator did not intend to create debate about innateness versus acquisition but to establish competencies about which the scholars have a significant degree of agreement. The intent is to answer "can they do it," according to normal growth and development patterns and "do they do it" according to results of program evaluation.

A need may be defined as a gap between expectation and performance. Preschool needs could, therefore, be those gaps between expectations and performance. The master list of competencies will identify the expectations. Hopefully, program implementation will intervene in ways that will fill those gaps between expectation and performance. In program efforts where data can be gathered on each individual child, prior to entry, systematic measures could be used to suggest specific "gap areas" that might be filled. This identification of need and the development of materials and processes to meet

those needs may generate a firm basis for the management of child development. Hunt (1961) said:

> "The problem for management of child development is to find out how to govern the encounters that children have with their environments to foster both an optimally rapid rate of intellectual development and a satisfying life."

Although congenial elements of the environment and a careful nurturing can accelerate and broaden development, genetic and metabolic factors contribute to the pace of development that is "natural" for each child. Most programmatic efforts for preschoolers assume that development proceeds in predictable stages and that educators can thus plan learning activities which will foster individual growth and development during that stage. Attempting to perform developmental tasks in a rather nebulous sea of assumptions becomes overwhelming to a child development specialist. This investigator found himself adrift in this sea when the decision was made to launch the investigation.

Since answers to the first two major questions (pages 5,6) cannot be obtained in the foreseeable future from our National Scholars, the third question was addressed by the investigator.

- Do we have consensus among the scholars of child growth and development about specifics of growing and developing?

This question was further defined:

- What degree of agreement can be established among the scholars about the competencies of children, terminal behavior age 6 years 0 months?

From a literature search a Prime Competency List(See Appendage Item #1) was produced by the investigator and submitted to a National Panel of Scholars (See Appendage Item #2). Responses from the National Panel were analyzed

providing a second list of competencies (See Appendage Item #3) which were then submitted to the National Panel and an Appalachian Panel of Scholars (See Appendage Item #4) for a systematic judging.

The responses of the National Panel to the Prime Competency List, Troutt ('74), helped the investigator construct the second competency list. This list was formulated into "An Early Childhood Competency Rating Instrument," Troutt ('74). A comparative analysis was conducted with the ratings of the National and Appalachian panel members from this instrument.

Those competencies that received significant agreement among the National Panel of Scholars became a part of the competency base from which the curriculum evolves. The responses of the National Panel and the Appalachian Panel were compared. Where there were significant differences, those that the Appalachian Panel supported were incorporated into the competency base.

It was determined early in the creation of the investigative design that the consumer group, Appalachian Parents, would have an opportunity to provide input into the competency base. The investigator designed, "A Parent Rating Instrument for Early Childhood Competencies." This scale was administered to approximately 1,000 Appalachian Parents in a seven(7) state region: Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia. This instrument was constructed by using each item from "An Early Childhood Competency Rating Instrument" translated into parent's language. A comparative analysis was conducted using National Panel, Appalachian Panel, and Parent Panel responses. Those competencies that receive agreement among all three groups have become the top priority items in the competency base. If there were discrepancies, the consensus of the Parent Panel became an overriding determinant.

Delivering the Competencies

Chart #1 and Chart #2 (pages 10,11) demonstrate the curriculum formation and the delivery system. From the competencies established by the investigation (See Chart #1, page 10) the investigator then formed Competency Categories (See Appendage Item #3). In each of these categories behavioral descriptives were created that would implement each competency within each category. These descriptors were sent to each production unit to be incorporated into their materials and processes (See Chart #2, page 11).

An evaluation unit within the HOPE Process will measure the degree of effectiveness for each competency item by evaluating the execution of same in each component of the process. There are several recycling loops that provide the opportunity for revision as the materials are being produced. There is one recycling loop in evaluation that feeds evaluative results to the process about the overall effectiveness of each component.

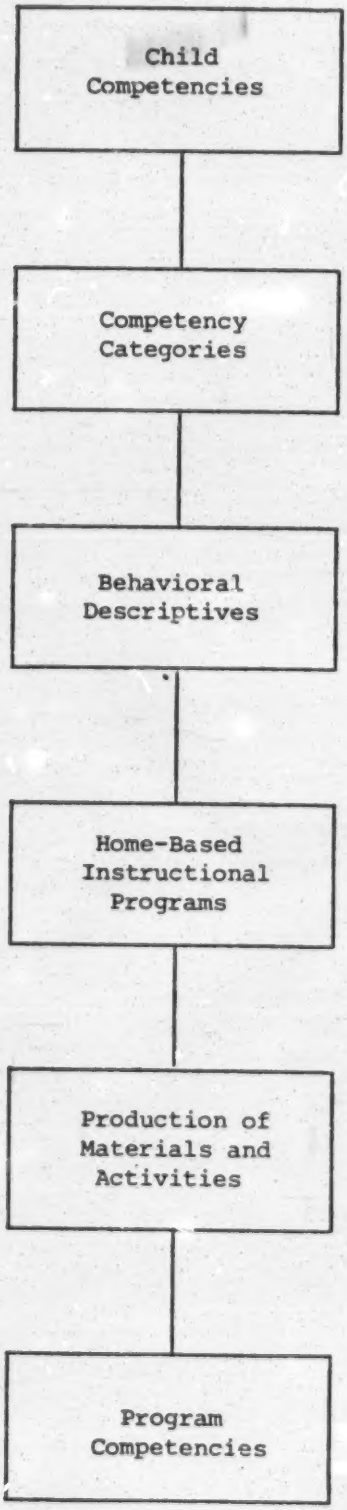
Summary Statement

The phases of this study that have been described seemed imperative to the investigator, if an empirical base for curriculum development was to be established. Several outcomes have become evident as the work progressed. 1) A master list of child competencies for "normal" American preschoolers has been established. 2) A master list of competencies for "normal" Appalachian preschoolers has been established. 3) A list of competencies for preschool children has been established by Appalachian parents. 4) A production and delivery system for preschool education has been established with research and evaluative components to relate what "works and doesn't work."

Perhaps, as is true with most investigations, we have begun to establish an additional degree of empiricism in our work with early childhood education endeavors.

Chart #1

Empirically Referenced Instructional Model



HOPE (Home-Oriented Preschool Education) Integration Model

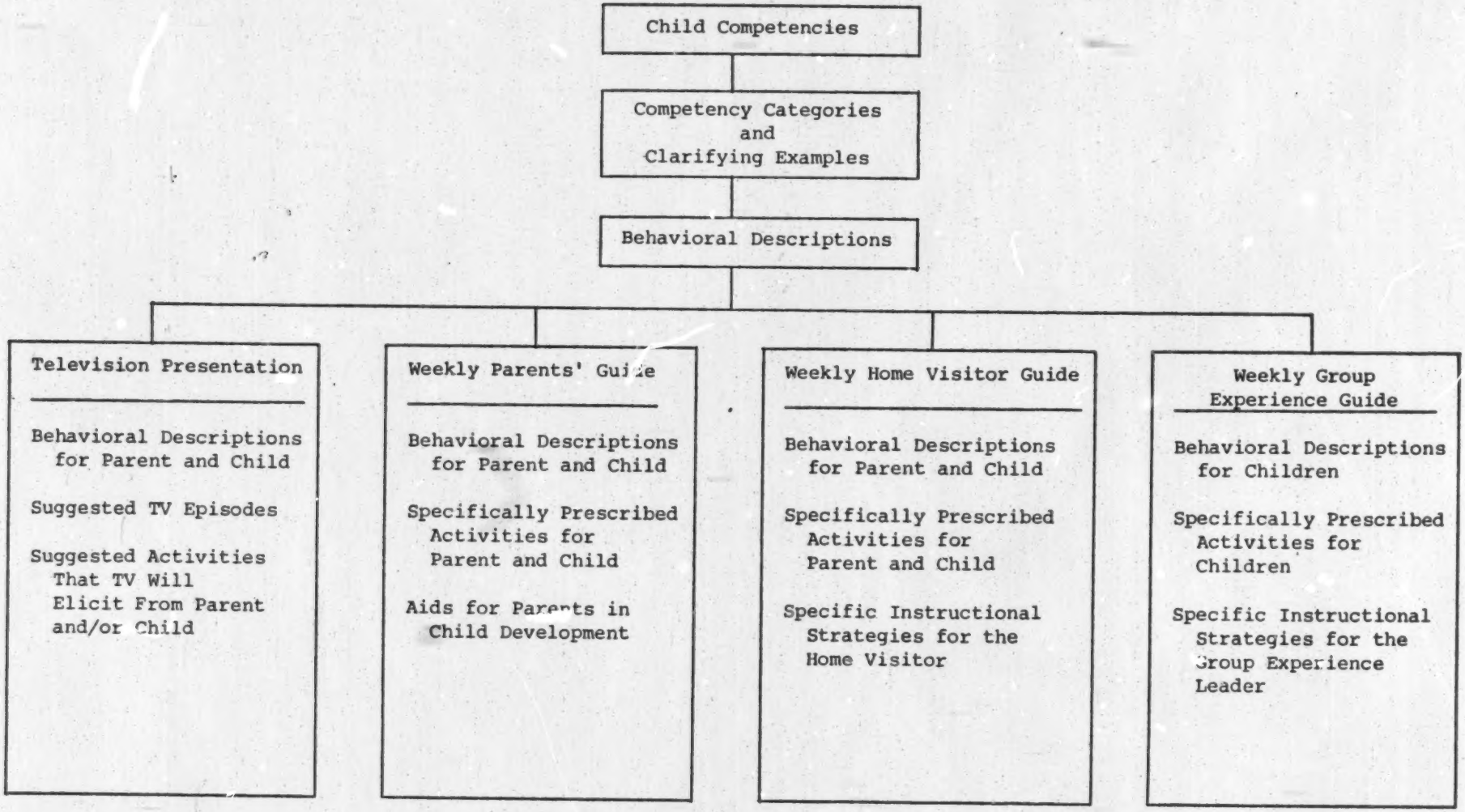

Child Competencies
Competency Categories and Clarifying Examples
Behavioral Descriptions
Television Presentation
Behavioral Descriptions for Parent and Child
Suggested TV Episodes
Suggested Activities That TV Will Elicit From Parent and/or Child
Weekly Parents' Guide
Behavioral Descriptions for Parent and Child
Specifically Prescribed Activities for Parent and Child
Aids for Parents in Child Development
Weekly Home Visitor Guide
Behavioral Descriptions for Parent and Child
Specifically Prescribed Activities for Parent and Child
Specific Instructional Strategies for the Home Visitor
Weekly Group Experience Guide
Behavioral Descriptions for Children
Specifically Prescribed Activities for Children
Specific Instructional Strategies for the Group Experience Leader

Chart #2

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Appendage Item #1

Prime Competency List

Category: Classification

Competency: Ability to form concepts

Example: To recognize repetition of patterns
To establish and label categories
To generalize from one situation to another

Competency: Ability to discriminate by sound

Example: To distinguish between sounds
To distinguish rhythm
To identify sources of sounds

Competency: Ability to discriminate by sight

Example: To distinguish shapes
To distinguish sizes
To distinguish colors

Competency: Ability to discriminate by touch

Example: To distinguish textures
To distinguish temperature
To distinguish shapes

Competency: Ability to sort

Example: To recognize similar qualities in different objects

Competency: Ability to ordinate

Example: To arrange in sequence
To construct one-to-one correspondence

Competency: Ability to conserve

Example: To match on a one-to-one basis
To distinguish quantity
To correlate shape with quantity

Competency: Ability to measure

Example: To distinguish time
To distinguish weight
To distinguish distance

Competency: Ability to denote spatial relationships

Example: To distinguish relative locations

Category: Communication

Competency: Ability to express feelings

Example: By statement
By demeanor
By avoidance

Competency: Ability to articulate

Example: To be precise in speech
To be sensitive to vocal inflections
To be sensitive to audience

Competency: Ability to describe (essentially a pictorial concern)

Example: To recognize the salient characters of the things to be described
To use words with precision
To use comparisons

Competency: Ability to explain (essentially a functional concern)

Example: To recognize the dynamics of the operation to be explained
To detail relationships of function
To be aware of audience's familiarity with thing being explained

Competency: Ability to label

Example: To realize the importance of labels as a convenience in communicating with others
To realize the connection of function to labelling
To realize that all feelings, conducts, and materials can be labelled

Competency: Ability to recognize the social functions of language

Example: To realize that language is neither "right" nor "wrong," but rather "appropriate" or "inappropriate" to a given situation
To realize that language has a function other than communication of information, that function being class/character typing

Competency: Ability to use non-verbal cues

Example: To recognize that communication can proceed without the written or spoken word
To become acquainted with common gestures

Category: Coordination

Competency: Ability to construct

Example: To be aware of the relationships of parts to the whole
To assess materials
To use materials

Competency: Ability to copy

Example: To develop eye-hand coordination
To comprehend design

Competency: Ability to draw

Example: To conceive and hold mental pictures
To develop eye-hand coordination
To comprehend design

Competency: Ability to use body to express feelings

Example: To recognize effect of physical gestures on others
To dance
To accept body movements as a respectable form of expression

Competency: Ability to control large muscles

Example: To balance
To move in the ways one wants to

Competency: Ability to control small muscles

Example: To manipulate small objects with hands and fingers
To develop eye-hand coordination
To use many parts of the body simultaneously

Category: Habits and Attitudes

Competency: Ability to initiate action

Example: To realize when an action would improve existing conditions
To know the range and probable results of actions

Competency: Ability to plan action

Example: To make choices based on the dynamics of a given situation
To assess resources
To anticipate end results

Competency: Ability to persist in actions

Example: To increase attention span
To recognize correlation between time spent and results achieved
To recognize interim successes

Competency: Ability to be self-reliant

Example: To know one's own abilities
To accurately assess one's work
To realize that others cannot always be counted on for help

Competency: Ability to sustain health and safety

Example: To recognize what is beneficial and detrimental to health
To see the connection of good physical health to effective mental activity
To realize that prevention of illness is primary to being healthy
To recognize appropriate social behaviors

Category: Social Relationships

Competency: Ability to assume appropriate social behaviors

Example: To listen and follow directions
To work with others for a common goal
To converse well

Competency: Ability to get attention

Example: To role play
To ask questions
To manifest a sense of urgency

Competency: Ability to maintain attention

Example: To be direct
To be sincere
To maintain eye contact

Competency: Ability to adopt the perspective of another

Example: To role play
To put oneself in the conditions of others
To play with and talk to others

Competency: Ability to respect the individuality of others

Example: To tolerate visible differences in others
To express admiration for the differences of others
To express concern over the differences of others

Appendage Item #2

National Panel of Scholars

Abramovitz, Robert
Assistant Professor
Yale Child Study Center
Yale University
333 Cedar Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06519

Anderson, Scarvia
Southern Regional Division
Educational Testing Service
17 Executive Park Drive, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Bereiter, Carl
Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences
202 Junipero Serra Boulevard
Stanford, California 94305

Brudenel, Gerald
Assistant Professor
Early Childhood Education Program
College of Education
Division of Professional and Clinical Programs
The Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida 32306

Butler, Annie
Professor of Education
Education #326
School of Education
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

Gagne, Robert
Professor of Educational Research
Center for Education Technology
The Florida State University
415 N. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Gotts, Edward
Professor of Education
School of Education
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

Hartup, Willard
Director
Institute of Child Development
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Hess, Robert
Professor of Education
School of Education
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California 94305

Hunt, J. McVicker
Professor of Psychology and Elementary Education
Room 617, Psychology Building
University of Illinois
Champaign-Urbana, Illinois 61801

Jester, Emile
Associate Professor of Education
Acting Director, Institute of Human Resources
College of Education
513 Weil Hall
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32601

Kagan, Jerome
Professor of Developmental Psychology
Room 510
William James Hall
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Katz, Lilian
Professor of Education
Director, ERIC, Early Childhood Education
805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue
University of Illinois
Champaign-Urbana, Illinois 61801

McCandless, Boyd
Professor of Psychology
Director of Developmental Psychology
Emory University
2469 Greenglade Road, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

Schoggen, Maxine
Research Associate
John F. Kennedy Center
Research in Education and Human Development
Peabody College
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Shipman, Virginia
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

White, Burton
Lecturer and Senior Research Associate
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

White, Sheldon
Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology and Social Relations
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Appendage Item #3

Samples of Competencies

Category: Classificatior

Competencies:

- Ability to form concepts
- Ability to discriminate by sound
- Ability to discriminate by sight
- Ability to discriminate by touch
- Ability to sort
- Ability to ordinate
- Ability to conserve
- Ability to measure
- Ability to denote spatial relationships

Category: Communication

Competencies:

- Ability to recognize the social functions of language
- Ability to label
- Ability to explain (essentially a functional concern)
- Ability to describe (essentially a pictorial concern)
- Ability to articulate
- Ability to express feelings
- Ability to use non-verbal cues

Category: Coordination

Competencies:

- Ability to construct
- Ability to copy
- Ability to draw
- Ability to use body to express feelings
- Ability to control large muscles
- Ability to control small muscles

Category: Habits and Attitudes

Competencies:

- Ability to initiate action
- Ability to plan action
- Ability to persist in actions
- Ability to be self-reliant
- Ability to sustain health and safety

Category: Social Relationships

Competencies:

Ability to assume appropriate social behaviors
Ability to get attention
Ability to maintain attention
Ability to adapt the perspective of another
Ability to respect the individuality of others

Appendage Item #4

Appalachian Panel of Scholars

Aderhold, Elizabeth
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education
427 F College of Education
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602

Berry, Mary
Professor of Education
Box 296
School of Education
Middle Tennessee State University
Murphreesboro, Tennessee 37130

Brunk, Jason
Director
The Early Childhood Institute
College of Education
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio 45701

Cagle, Lynn
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Claxton Education Building
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee 37916

Cowles, Milly
Professor of Early Childhood Education
School of Education
University of Alabama
Birmingham, Alabama 35294

Day, Barbara
Coordinator of Early Childhood Programs
Assistant Professor of Education
School of Education
302 Peabody Hall
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Deal, Therry
Chairman
Department of Home Economics
Georgia College
Milledgeville, Georgia 31061

Harper, Mary
Director
Early Childhood Education Continuous Progress Program
Williamsburg County
417 School Street
Kingston, South Carolina 29556

Hart, Lillian
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education
Department of Elementary Education
Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee 38152

Kamara, Barbara
Director
Learning Institute of North Carolina
Child Development Training Center
800 Silver Avenue
Greensboro, North Carolina 27403

Looff, David
Associate Clinical Professor of Child Psychiatry
University of Kentucky
1308 Fincastle Road
Lexington, Kentucky 40502

Stapleton, Pat
Training Specialist
Center for Leadership Development for Child Care
University of North Carolina
Greensboro, North Carolina 27412

Wear, Pat
Chairman
Department of Education
Box 2288
Berea College
Berea, Kentucky 40403